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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 003302

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/FO AND NEA/I. NSC FOR PHEE AND VROOMAN.

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TAGS: [IR](#) [IZ](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: A/S FELTMAN DISCUSSES NATIONAL ELECTION,
GOVERNMENT FORMATION, AND REGIONAL RELATIONS WITH AYAD
ALLAWI

REF: BAGHDAD 3205

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR GARY A. GRAPPO FOR REASONS
1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: NEA Assistant Secretary (A/S) Feltman on 15 December met with former Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi to discuss the ongoing U.S. commitment to Iraq, the upcoming Iraqi national election and government formation process, and the importance of increasing regional engagement with Iraq. Allawi welcomed the long-term U.S. commitment to Iraq and stressed the importance of Iraq holding a national election that is perceived as both legitimate and transparent. Allawi highlighted the need for Iraqi leaders to begin working together prior to the elections to tackle the obstacles of government formation. With regard to regional engagement, Allawi stressed the interdependence of Iraqi and regional stability and noted the importance of Saudi Arabia as a key counterbalance to Iranian influence in the region. END SUMMARY.

AREAS OF KEY FOCUS IN ELECTION RUN-UP

¶2. (C) NEA Assistant Secretary (A/S) Feltman on 15 December met with former Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and stressed the US government's long-term commitment to Iraq. A/S Feltman noted that the U.S. sees Iraq as a strong economic and political partner over the long term. Allawi told A/S Feltman that he believed the next three months were crucial for the future of Iraq, and specific attention must be paid to election security, voter turnout, and ensuring the integrity of the election between now and 7 March. With regard to voter turnout, Allawi assessed that a large percentage of the Iraqi people had lost interest in the elections, as evidenced by low voter turnout in certain areas during provincial elections, and noted that this was a problem that must be considered. Allawi also stressed the importance of election security and election integrity, noting that post-election violence and Iraqi stability will depend a great deal on what happens following the election, to include the perception of fraud, transparency, and regional validation of the election.

¶3. (C) A/S Feltman asked about the government formation process and the length of time it could take to negotiate key government positions following the election. Allawi shared A/S Feltman's concerns and stated that he did not want to see an extended government formation period as it would be

counterproductive to both security and the economy. Allawi was working to encourage discussions among key coalition and party leaders on this topic prior to the election, but believed it would remain a problem following the election. Allawi said that he had suggested to Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masud Barzani, President Jalal Talabani, ISCI Chairman Ammar al-Hakim, Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, the IIP, as well as others that they meet prior to elections to begin discussing among other things, the elections, political process, joint responsibilities, and possible post-election problems. Allawi said that all parties had been receptive to such discussions, but he was still waiting for a response from the Da'wa Party. (COMMENT: Qstill waiting for a response from the Da'wa Party. (COMMENT: Allawi was referring to Maliki's State of Law coalition. END COMMENT.) Allawi noted 20 January as a possible date for a first meeting.

14. (C) Allawi favored a national unity government after elections, but acknowledged that he does not know where other bloc leaders stand on the issue. He stressed the virtue of an inclusive, secular government, and stated his belief that successful elections and government formation would lead to a general political consensus within 1-2 years. Allawi believed very strongly that there must be a Presidency Council, despite the fact that it is due to lapse with the formation of a new government, as the country is still in transition and needs "checks and balances" and consensus to discuss the best way forward.

ALLAWI ENGAGING ALL, INCLUDING MILITANTS

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15. (C) Allawi noted that he engages with all elements of Iraqi society, including some members of "resistance movements" within Iraq. (COMMENT: Allawi specifically mentioned Jaysh al-Islami as one of the "resistance groups" he has spoken with. END COMMENT.) Allawi said that the militant group leaders he has spoken with tell him they were remaining quiet at present and that their primary concern was Iranian influence over some groups in Iraq. According to Allawi, these militant groups wanted to see a dramatic decrease in Iranian influence, the gradual disappearance of sectarian issues in Iraq, and security for their groups in Iraq. As such, some of these groups had expressed concern about the draw down of U.S. forces.

ELECTION OBSERVERS

16. (C) Allawi noted that earlier on 15 December he had spoken with Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa regarding a possible delegation of Arab observers for the Iraqi national election. Allawi said that Amr was optimistic about securing a good delegation of Arab observers and planned to raise this topic at the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit, which he was currently attending. Allawi stressed the importance of engaging the U.S., UN, GCC, and Arab League on the issue of election observers, and noted that an Arab observer delegation would be a positive step for Arab states' relations with Iraq. Allawi also noted that his party would send domestic observers for the election.

THE U.S. ROLE POST-ELECTIONS

17. (C) Asked about the role the U.S. should play following the Iraqi national election, Allawi stated that the US should do two things: (1) try to get the Iraqis to think and act together for the benefit of all, and (2) press the various players to understand that Iraq must not be dominated by Iran

or any other entity, and that Iraq must engage regionally to this end. Allawi suggested that the Embassy create a small U.S. task force to lay out the possibilities of what different parties can bring to the negotiating table in government formation, as well as the perspectives and interests of key regional players with regard to Iraqi government formation.

CHANGING ISCI IMAGE

¶8. (C) Allawi said that recent changes in the image presented by the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) are in part election posturing, but also in his opinion, reflect the beginnings of change within the party, which Allawi believed should be encouraged. Allawi said he had spoken with ISCI Chairman Ammar al-Hakim the previous week, following al-Hakim's trip to Kuwait, and had encouraged the ISCI leader to maintain the recent progressive tone of messages on issues such as de-Ba'athification. (Comment: Allawi was probably referring to ISCI Chairman Ammar al-Hakim's recent tour of regional Arab countries, and emphasis in his public statements on improving relations with Arab neighbors. End Comment.)

SAUDI ARABIA: THE KEY TO COUNTERING IRAN

¶9. (C) Allawi believed that Saudi Arabia was the key to balancing Iranian influence in the region and must become engaged in doing so, and noted that Iranian influence is by far the biggest fear of Saudi leadership. Allawi said that he has seen evidence that Iran is active in the eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia, which raised alarm among Saudi leadership.

¶10. (S//NF) Allawi provided A/S Feltman and Political

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Minister Counselor (POL M/C) Grappo with purported Yemeni intelligence documents that he said prove that Iran is supporting the Huthis.

Changing Kurdish Politics

¶11. (C) When questioned regarding the changing nature of Kurdish politics with the emergence of the Goran List, Allawi affirmed that Kurdish politics are changing and that the PUK is facing significant problems. The party is plagued by internal splits, leaders leaving the party, and loss of seats to the Goran List in the July 2009 Kurdish provincial elections. Allawi noted that Goran List leader Nawshirwan Mustafa was identified by some as "an extremist." (Comment: While Mustafa is derided as an extremist by some PUK and KDP leaders, his position on core issues such as how to implement Article 140 to resolve Kirkuk (reftel) is actually more moderate. Given Allawi's ties to traditional PUK and KDP leaders, his characterization of Mustafa is less than entirely credible. End Comment.) Allawi said that Nawshirwan believed it was important to keep both Arabs and Arab countries, in addition to the Iranians, engaged in Kurdistan. Additionally, Allawi mentioned the growing influence of Islamists in Kurdistan, and the growing sentiment among technocrats and academics in Kurdistan away from independence and toward remaining part of Iraq. (Note: The extent to which Islamists are gaining influence in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region is the subject of debate and remains unclear. End note.)

¶12. A/S Feltman's party cleared on this cable.
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